

Rawlings-Blake

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Mayoral transition team to assist incoming mayor

Councilman Young appears to have votes to become council president

by Julie Scharper

Baltimore Sun

9:44 PM EST, January 14, 2010

Baltimore City Council President Stephanie C. Rawlings-Blake named a five-member team to guide her transition to the mayor's office, a group that includes several lawyers, a community activist and a well-known lobbyist and political strategist.

The group will review city agencies to "ensure all public and taxpayer funds are used in the most effective and efficient manner," recruit additional transition team members and evaluate policy in six broad areas.

"Now more than ever, Baltimore needs innovative fiscal reform that protects core services, especially public safety, public education and job creation efforts," said Rawlings-Blake, who will take office Feb. 4, after the resignation of Mayor Sheila Dixon.

Councilman Bernard C. "Jack" Young has emerged as the front-runner for the council presidency. At least eight council members -- enough for the majority needed to win appointment -- have pledged support for Young, a council veteran known for his outspokenness.

The members of the group have not been assigned specific areas, said Rawlings-Blake, adding that she believes it's best not to "micro-manage."

The team includes longtime community activist Nina Harper; attorney Kenneth L. Thompson; Shale D. Stiller, president of the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation; and former deputy attorney general Eleanor Carey. A legal counsel to the board, Eric L. Bryant, is Rawlings-Blake's high school friend, law school classmate and, according to a news release, "confidant ... for her entire career in public life." of Rawlings-Blake.

Others will be announced on a rolling basis, Rawlings-Blake said. The leaders of the team have been asked to draft a report with recommendations by March 5.

A transition team should draw people from diverse backgrounds who can devote time to the project, said James T. Brady, who led Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.'s transition process. "This is a very concerted effort and a very constrained period of time," he said. "You need people who are going to be willing to spend the time in that short time frame to get things done."

The leaders must meet with all agency heads and stay "in the trenches" in City Hall, said Brady, the managing director of Ballantrae International, a management consulting firm. They should update the new mayor regularly on their work, he said.

Bryant, a former NAACP senior staffer, advised Kweisi Mfume during his 2006 senate bid and served on Gov. Martin O'Malley's transition team when he was elected mayor in 1999. A member of an influential Annapolis lobbying firm and law practice, he has registered as a lobbyist in the city since 2007.



Last year, he registered to lobby for three companies in Baltimore. He advocated for Wal-Mart against legislation restricting the use of plastic bags, for Optotraffic on red-light camera issues and for a Capitol Heights-based scrap metal processor on an environmental bill.

Bryant said that he did not plan to register as a lobbyist this year and that his past work posed no conflict. His work on the transition "has more to do with my role as a city resident, a community-minded activist," said Bryant, adding that he would recuse himself from any matter involving the firms who have been clients. "That's not in the best interest of my friend. That's not in the best interest of the city."

The council president did not believe Bryant's work as a lobbyist presented a conflict of interest, said spokesman Ryan O'Dougherty.

Harper, the lone transition team leader who is not an attorney, is an activist who is held in high esteem among city officials. A Belair-Edison resident, she is the executive director of the Oliver Community and ran for a council seat twice in the 1990s.

"She's a force," said Young. "She knows the ins and outs of city government."

Harper said she received a call from Rawlings-Blake staff Wednesday asking her to be part of the effort. The council president has "been a big supporter of our community youth initiative services," in Oliver, she said.

Carey has a long history in politics and law. A former deputy attorney general, she unsuccessfully challenged J. Joseph Curran Jr. for attorney general in 1994. She served as a legal adviser to former Gov. Parris N. Glendening and was part of O'Malley's gubernatorial transition.

Thompson, who has won national accolades for his legal work, has served on the city's Judicial Nominating Commission. In 2000, when he was commission chairman, the panel recommended Catherine Curran O'Malley, now the state's first lady, for a District Court judgeship. Glendening appointed her to the bench.

The fourth attorney, Stiller, is a "legend in his own time" who knows how to "connect the dots and get things done," said Councilwoman Mary Pat Clarke.

In 2002, he won more than \$300 million in damages from Iran for the parents of a Navy diver killed by Hezbollah hijackers. Two years later, he left trial work to become the executive director of the \$2 billion Weinberg Foundation. For years, the foundation was in negotiation with the city over a parcel of land near the long-stalled Superblock development project. The deal was finalized late last year.

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